

Mackerel Committee Report
August 20, 2018
Dr. Tom Frazer – Chair

CMP Landings Update

NMFS staff noted that the commercial king mackerel ACL is being caught, while the recreational sector is under its ACL. Landings for Spanish mackerel and cobia are below their respective stock ACLs.

Gulf Cobia CPUE Indices Update

The Committee reviewed the updated catch per unit effort (CPUE) indices for Gulf cobia from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) and the headboat survey along with comments provided by the SSC. The MRFSS index did not show an obvious trend in CPUE, while the headboat index showed a decrease over the last five years. Generally, the SSC thought the updated indices provided no clear indication of a problem with Gulf cobia. The SSC did acknowledge that the headboat index might be used as a type of fishery-independent index, since headboats do not explicitly target cobia. However, a shift in effort to other species may have occurred in the last five years, and may explain that trend in CPUE. Council members from Alabama and Louisiana reported that landings of cobia by private anglers had increased since 2016 in those states; landings of cobia in Alabama by for-hire operators were lower since 2016.

CMP Framework Amendment 7

Staff reviewed the size and possession limit analyses in CMP Framework Amendment 7. The SSC determined that the analyses were appropriate, and noted that an increase in the minimum size limit would result in a greater reduction in fishing mortality than any of the proposed decreases in possession limits. Discard mortality for Gulf cobia was discussed in light of the action items in CMP Framework Amendment 7. The liaison for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council added that the size limit increase to 36" FL for Atlantic cobia has now been in effect for one year, and that fishermen have readily adjusted to the minimum size limit increase. Committee members discussed the possible disproportionate harvest of females at larger minimum size limits. Staff agreed that there could be such a disproportionate harvest, as females reach a larger size at age compared to males. The Committee also discussed the possibility of a closed season corresponding with peak spawning activity; however, this approach did not receive strong support due, in large part, to the migratory nature of cobia and the potential to disadvantage harvest opportunities in some Gulf States.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 1, to select Alternative 2 as the preferred alternatives.

Alternative 2: Increase the recreational and commercial minimum size limit for Gulf cobia to 36 inches FL in the Gulf Council's jurisdictional area.

Motion carried with two opposed.

Madam Chair, this concludes by report.